



News Release

For immediate release: March 20, 2014

(14-038)

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Tuberculosis rate increasing in Washington

Disease is a public health threat as antibiotic resistant strains make it more difficult to treat

OLYMPIA — Tuberculosis cases increased in Washington for the first time after several years of decline. Last year, 209 cases of tuberculosis (TB) were reported – a 13 percent increase from the 185 cases reported in 2012. The TB rate in Washington has historically been lower than the national average, but in 2013 it matched the national rate.

“Tuberculosis can be a very serious, even fatal, disease. Treatment is difficult for people because it requires taking multiple medications for several months,” State Health Officer Dr. Kathy Lofy said. “It’s important for public health and the healthcare community to stay vigilant and work together to control tuberculosis.”

TB is a dangerous disease. It’s a [bacterial infection that usually affects the lungs](#) but can attack other parts of the body. Most symptoms include fever, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, and a persistent cough. Some people may be infected with TB and have no symptoms. Timely treatment with proper antibiotics is the key to survival and less severe symptoms. People with HIV or AIDS, individuals younger than 5 and older than 50, and those with weakened immune systems are at increased risk. The disease is spread in the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks and others breathe in the bacteria. The counties with the most cases in 2013 were King (114), Snohomish (26), Pierce (22), Spokane (7), Clark (5), and Thurston (5).

Drug-resistant TB continues to be a public health threat in Washington. This type of TB requires treatment for a longer period of time. In 2013, two cases of multi-drug resistant TB were reported to the state Department of Health. Infection control procedures must be in place in hospitals or health care settings to prevent exposure to TB to ensure that it doesn’t spread.

TB rates are often higher among racial and ethnic groups. Almost 75 percent of 2013 cases in the state were in foreign-born individuals. In 2013, 53.6 percent of all TB cases counted in Washington were among Asians, followed by Hispanics (13.9 percent) and whites (13.4 percent). American Indian and Alaska Natives accounted for only 1.4 percent of Washington's TB cases in 2013. Health care providers, lab workers, and public health agencies must continue to work together to guard against the resurgence of TB. Just 75 years ago, TB killed nearly 1,000 state residents every year. In 2013, there were 16 TB-related deaths.

The burden of the disease continues to increase, particularly as drug-resistant cases become more common globally. While there's been considerable work done to prevent the spread of this disease, fighting TB is a long-term commitment that must be met by the public health and health care communities.

March 24 is World TB Day. Worldwide, TB is one of the leading causes of death from infectious diseases. About nine million people are infected with TB around the world every year, and nearly two million die. World TB Day provides the opportunity to share solutions and discuss issues related to this pandemic and to support worldwide TB control efforts. The Washington State Department of Health invites you to [attend an educational event](#), *One State. One World. Working to Eliminate TB*, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. on March 24 at Seattle Town Hall. This event will teach people how TB affects individuals, communities, and collective resources. There will be opportunities to learn about TB vaccines, multi-drug resistant TB, and complicated TB case studies. There will also be a photovoice project that illustrates the experiences of local people impacted by TB.

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